DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 547 CS 510 893

AUTHOR Wills, Katherine V.
TITLE Hip Hop WAC: Students Redefine Writing in a Junior High School Technology Camp.
PUB DATE 2002-03-09
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference (6th, Houston, TX, March 7-9, 2002).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Culture; *Cultural Context; *Disadvantaged Youth; *Hermeneutics; *Middle School Students; Middle Schools; *Student Behavior; Summer Programs; Teacher Attitudes; *Writing Across the Curriculum; Writing Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Computer Camps; Contact Zones; Hip Hop Generation; Power; University of Louisville KY; Writing Contexts

ABSTRACT

When a University of Louisville Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) director, a team of graduate students, and an instructor designed a free summer computer camp program for disadvantaged middle schoolers, they imagined that the middle schoolers would respond to the first instruction as if the educators had restrained them in technological and epistemological straitjackets. Middle schoolers refused to behave as the teachers had imagined. The ways of writing the educators had planned were not the ways of writing middle schoolers envisioned. This paper argues that most of the divergence between middle schoolers' behavior and the graduate teachers' expectations were situated in the contact zone between class-bred class differences between Hip-Hop techno black culture and bourgeois values of the educators. The paper provides the following: an overview of the camp; its objectives; participant demographics; how the Hip Hop culturalization manifested itself in certain classroom practices; and what makes an effective good Hip Hop "gansta" writer who knows his or her audience or "posse." It also delineates a "hermenuetics of Hip Hop." The paper concludes that the middle schoolers "wrote across the curriculum" by writing with and about technology. They wrote in color and sound for themselves and their community, and through writing, the middle schoolers took power. Transcriptions from the computer camp are appended. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 463 547

Hip Hop WAC: Students Redefine Writing in a Junior High School Technology Camp.

Katherine V. Wills

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Wills

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

CS 510 893

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WAC Conference 2002
Rice University

Hip Hop WAC: Students Redefine Writing in a Junior High School Technology Camp

Katherine V. Wills
Saturday, March 9, 2002 10:45- Noon.

Introduction

Michel Foucault states in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) that the one purpose of disciplinary technology in institutional contexts such as prisons, workshops, hospitals, asylums, and schools is manifested to forge a "docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved." (pg. 198). To forge this new body those in power use drills, body training, standardization, and control of space, control of input. This disciplinary control as it is manifested through control of the body in the enclosed space is in service of the accumulation of power with in a capital driven polity. When we teach technologies in classrooms, writing and/or computers, we limit the power of our students to fully control their bodies, even if we tell them that have infinite access to the virtual. Students are expected to conform to implicit physical, social, and behavioral norms. Those who abide by the norms are rewarded. Those who succeed best in the corseting become teachers.

When a University of Louisville CAI director, a team of graduate students, and I designed a free summer computer camp program for disadvantaged middle schoolers, we did imagine that our middle schoolers would respond to our ist instruction as if we had restrained them technological and epistemological straightjackets. The ways in which the middle schoolers wanted to write using technology and the ways in which they wanted to

know their environment was contrary to the ways of knowing of the graduate camp instructors. Middle Schoolers refused to behave as the teachers had imagined The ways of writing we had planned were not the ways of writing middle schoolers envisioned. I argue that most of the divergence between middle schoolers behavior and the graduate teachers' expectations were situated in contact zone between class-based class differences between Hip Hop techno black culture and bourgeose values of the educators.

Camp Background

Camp Background

During the summer of 2001, University of Louisville English department CAI Director Pamela Takayoshi and five doctoral students in composition and rhetoric conducted two two-week long computer camps. The camp leaders selected students from four middle schools from neighbor hoods surrounding the University of Louisville. Students had to come from under privileged population. This status was determined by the percentage of students in a K-12 school who participated in the school meal programs. In other words, the more students that participate in the food programs, the more under privilege a school population was determined to be.

It is important to note here, that many, if not most, of our middle schoolers were not expected to complete a bachelor's degree. One of the objectives of this computer camp was to stimulate the interest of middle schoolers who may not think that they are college material; to bring them on campus; to have them become familiarized with higher education; to identity with higher education; to identity with technology; to have them

share their writing. What I learned was that these middle schoolers already identify very closely with the technology of computers and writing, however, they do not identify with technology and writing in the same ways as traditional college bound students might.

Camp Objectives

As program coordinators, we set these writing objectives:

Incorporate student writing into e-formats

Write technology narratives for publication

Original text production for e-zine

Interviewing of visitors

Creative writing- poetry

Personal narrative

Revision

As program coordinators, we set these technology objectives:

Practice Web authoring skills

Web authoring of a collective student e-zine

Graphics work:

Creating digital files

Using image manipulation software: scanning, compressing, printing

Using digital cameras and taking digital photographs

As program coordinators, we set these critical pedagogical objectives:

Understand technopower through a critical lens

Discuss the power of technologies: computers and writing

Become producers not only consumers of digital venues

Participant Demographics: Middle Schoolers and Graduate Instructors

Student demographic backgrounds varied form urban to Appalachian, African-American to white students. Students were selected for their underprovided status. Almost none of their parents had completed baccalaureates degrees. Instructors were four white middle western, (four women one man) and one African American woman raised in the Northeast. All would say they came from middle to upper middle class background social-economic backgrounds with three of the five instructors having attended private parochial high schools and two of the five having attended private undergraduate institutions: Amherst and Washington University, St. Louis, MO.

The instructors to greater or lesser degrees felt that they had an obligation to educate the middle schoolers by showing them how to use technology and express themselves through writing. Equally important, the instructors felt that they held superior knowledge about the critical technological literacy (Selfe) necessary to pass along to students. For example, middle schoolers were to be informed that

- technology serves those in power
- that technology is not neutral but imbricated in political and social agendas
- writing and technology users have an obligation to question extant authority
- writing and technology is a site for social change
- become producers technology not just consumers

The middle schoolers far from being dazzled by such critical insights were blasé. Middle schoolers were not oblivious that the technologies of writing and computers entailed power: middle schoolers sought power to become more part of a capital-based hegemony, not to question that hegemony. Middle schoolers said they wanted to know how to use technology to make money, to be rich, to spend. Middle schoolers resisted and rejected The notion of production for anything other than consumption was elusive.

Techo-black Theorization

Our middle schoolers came to the technology camp with a Hip Hop class-based understanding of writing, technology, and social interaction: the world is about power, as Foucault would tells us. Many of the teaching assumptions that the hyper-literate graduate student teachers brought to the camp were grounded in bourgeois class assumptions of their benevolent teacher power (read neo-colonial). The graduate students expected to varying degrees that the middles schoolers would be appreciative and "docile" while sharing in this opportunity. For the most part, the same graduate teacher theorized their teaching in critical pedagogy and critical technological literacy, for social awareness.

The middle schoolers already understood that technology and writing are about power. Teachers had one way of distributing power and the students had their way of appropriating power. The irony in this instructional situation is that both Hip Hop middle schoolers and the critical pedagogy writing instructors imagine themselves as liberatory,

progressive, and visionary agents. One group expressed their liberation from the underclass and one group left unexpressed their privileged class (ad hominum).

For the middle schoolers, their Hip Hop culturalization manifested itself in these classroom practices:

Middle schoolers

1. ms prefer to define writing as the manipulation of visual and audio text, rather than words
2. ms feel that verbal t.xts pale in comparison to the computer-generated features of Hip Hop music icons in commercial web sties
3. ms resist graduate teachers' control of physical and virtual space. They raised volume on the music sites, broke into spontaneous dance, often clustered in xenophobic peer groups
4. ms thwart graduate teachers' intentions for a smooth introduction, discussion, and acceptance of a critical pedagogy. The notion that technology should serve anything except capital seems, well, naïve to the ms
5. ms usurp control of their learning. Even though the graduate teachers stated in theory they wanted the middle schoolers to be empowered, in practice, the wrenching of control by the middle schoolers proved uncomfortable for the graduate teachers. This uncomfortability with order and controlled became cloaked in the language of discipline harkening back to Foucault's analysis of the institutions in service of the hegemony.

I have just outlined the responses of the middle schoolers. I know contextualize these responses in Tricia Rose's techno-black theory.

Rose argues in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture I Contemporary America* (1994) that Hip Hop music and its techno-black culture supports working class oppositional practices. Whether the middle schoolers were white or African American, the underlying values of were coded in values of Hip Hop. Hip Hop theorization "presumes that music is fundamentally related to the social world, that music, like other cultural creations, fulfills and denies social needs, that music embodies assumptions regarding social power, hierarchy, pleasure and worldview" (70). I compare the Hip Hop music that the middle schoolers wanted to blast from the 24 computers (that's 48 speakers) to slave fieldwork songs. The slaves are no longer limited to a category of imported Africans but inclusive of a disenfranchised indigenous people from Hip Hop class consciousness and culture—whether Black, Female, male, White, Hispanic, Native American. The expression through music and images reifies the middle schoolers as hegemonic outsiders, or the "gangstas". Just as field songs were often seen as subversive, so the music in the classroom was seen as at least disturbing by the graduate teachers. Writing with music and visuals is now as it was then, an overt critique of the hegemony.

Contrary to the graduate teachers' assumptions that the middle schoolers would come to us as e-tabla rasas, the middle schoolers had already internalized a technological aesthetic and politic. Rose explains that Hip Hop culturists are accustomed to using technology fluently to meet their communication needs: "...musical practitioners were trained to prepare new technologies for the privileged but have instead used these technologies for

alternative cultural expression" (63). Manipulation of technology in communication is central to the emergence of techno black cultural. (xv) Tools of power include sampling and dubbing equipment. Samplers are digital computers that manipulate sound primarily rather than words. Rose goes on to say that Hip Hop ethos (xiv) makes its way even the into the linguistic patterns. For instance speaking over someone is similar to the Jamaican "talk over and dub" (75). Also, the break beat, cut or musical rupture is similar to human interruption. The break beat is evident in Hip Hip innovator James Brown's songs "Hot Pants" or "Living in America. "

Hip Hop working class consciousness can be used to understand better how many K-12 students apply the technologies of writing and computers. Hip Hop is not just a musical movement, it is a graphic, verbal, and acoustic expression of a prevalent and powerful value system of many of the K-12 students that universities hope to attract and retain in undergraduate programs. Many of these students come with a view of writing disembodied from books and print sources. Writing, reading, communicating, and texting is mediated through alternative media. The thought of reading a 2000 word piece of flat text in a print source is not the normative experience for these students.

What makes an effective good Hip Hop "gansta" writer who knows his/her audience or posse?

money is primary goal (Lecture Tricia Rose)

control over ones environment with your posse

conspicuous consumption

no more or ethical responsibility: you get your own.

Where the liberal bourgeois graduate students attempt to critique the nest of capitalism from which their scholarship stems, the Hip Hop middle schoolers reify capitalism unashamedly perpetuating an exploitive dynamic: knowledge that every one cannot have the means of production.

1. Cash is King: Money talks, the discursive walks.

In the Hip Hop world class view, survival, cash, and power are king. From the class perspectives of the graduate students enlightenment and progressive critical awareness, if not activism is expected, The chasm is immense between the expectations of the graduate instructors and the middle schoolers about what constitutes writing and how the technologies of writing and computers should be used. To those on the margins everything must be used for its immediate value: be it utilitarian or aesthetic.

2. Power to Control One's Own Environment: The best access is the access you take.

Instructors espoused empowering middle schoolers by web authoring. Students controlled production, not just consumed it online. Technical facilities in the summer camp prevented students from having own web sites. A collective website was created for the middle schoolers. Only the instructors had passwords. Students soon tired of calling the instructor over to put in the codes. Students watched the instructors' hands and memorized the camp passwords during the first week. We had to change camp passwords as long as one collective site was used. Additionally, student memorized building access codes to doors and learned how to access the computer classrooms. Access codes for the

computing rooms had to also be changed. The assumptions by the instructors that middle schoolers needed to become cognizant of power were misinformed. Middle schoolers had a Hip Hop understanding that they were on the outside of the hegemony and needed to secure access codes and break into the system.

3. Impact: Conspicuous consumption

Writing from the Hip Hop means that verbal texts (interviews, personal narratives, poetry) are a lesser priority than the visual, and acoustic representation. Those iconic, colorful, mobile writings spoke to the middle schoolers. In Hip Hop ontology, being means being effective even if it is visceral and discomforting to the teachers. Graphical and acoustic arguments are valid and even preferred. Writing with color and sound is not just a manifestation of ease or laziness. Effectiveness with audience (student/peer) demands the visual and graphic. Lester Faigley notes that online discussion forums make transparent the "...bourgeois standards of politeness in classroom discussions...and discourses normally silenced are open to scrutiny" (Faigley 1992, 190)(288). The computer camp forum made visible the graduate teacher's expectation for social and writing process and product and the middle schoolers' resistance.

4. I am Ghetto: No ethical responsibility for your meanings

One student elegantly defined her esthetic and in the computer camp by e-spousing the fourth of its main tenets according to Rose. Hip Hippors feel no responsibility for success of the goals of the hegemony. As the female student said elegantly, "I am ghetto, my parents are ghetto, I will always be ghetto." She echoes Bourdieu's belief that we cannot

escape the class markers of our families. Hip Hop writing demands moving inverting the paradigm of black words on the white pages. To use vivid colors (reds, white on black, purple) is to question the hegemony. To break the stability of the written typeset page by hypertext and motion is to confront readers with the written message is in flux. To add the voices, noises, sirens, horns of acoustic is to ask the reader to really hear the message of the writer, not as it is abstracted into fixed text. This is what it is like to be ghettoto live in a Hip Hop textuality. The Hip Hop aesthetic demands writing with colors and noises.

A Hermeneutics of Hip Hop

The nature of writing as conceived by many of the working class students who in this camp said they had few intentions of continuing in college can be closely aligned with the visual and audio rhetoric as conceived by Aristotle's Classical Canon of delivery ((Invention, Arrangement, Memory, Delivery, and Style). Of the five elements of Aristotle's Canon I focus on delivery. Laura J. Gurak in "Reviving the Rhetoric's Fifth Canon: Delivery in Real Tine Virtual Discourse" discusses how the Web replaces print-based representation. Non-verbal elements of color, motion, sounds write the text with political expediency for these minority, working middle schoolers who seem to have bypassed the influences of print literacy period (roughly 1400 to 2000) to return to post-literacy as described by Janice Walker (preliterate, literate, computeracy, and post literacy). Indeed, print literacy since Gutenberg can be seen as a historical literacy anomaly. The students prefer to write with the aid of electronic technology and an emphasis on delivery of oral and written communication in a Hip Hop aesthetic.

Middle schoolers purpose for writing is to be persuasive and effective to their audience—each other. Lisa Gonsalves in "Making Connections: Addressing the Pitfalls of White Faculty/Black Male Student Communication" (2002) emphasizes the importance in learning of communicating in a language of the audience, in this case, in part black male students. Gonsalves situates the miscommunciation between the white instructors and black male students in race. I suggest that the miscommunication is also class based. In other words, a black male educated in private upper middle class schools with exposure to hegemonic culture would have fewer communication difficulties with instructors than even a white lower-class student. Working class Hip Hoppers oppose the effective and efficient means of technology as determined by the graduate teachers. Middle schoolers prefer acoustic and graphic writing. These students have at least as much exposure to visual and acoustic arguments as verbal arguments in printed books. They are, choose to be uncomplicated by the hyper-literate notions of communication held by the graduate instructors.

In addition to comparing the middle schoolers' preference for writing acoustically and graphically with concepts in Aristotle's canon of Delivery, I note how the middle schoolers' intuited rhetorical techniques transfer to the electronic text. Imagine Cicero persuades his audience in the Agora, the citizens shifting on stone benches, the vendors bustling at the periphery. Cicero stands surrounded by marble statuary of heroes and scholars making his argument with him. Each statue reinforces Cicero's argument. The middle schoolers publish (click and drag) media icons to make their arguments—I am visible, I am loud, I have power to produce and consume in my subculture. Finally, with

Aristotle and Cicero, we can add Gorgias's observation that mere sound of language can persuade an audience. The lilt and of language can lull an audience into agreement. I have heard it said in English literature courses that the soothing iambic pentameter of the English language so reminiscent of the human heartbeat woos its audience. How different a dactylic language is. For the middle schoolers, persuasion requires writing in a language that the audience understands. As classical rhetoricians used oratory techniques to persuade their audience, the middle schoolers write a Hip Hop text using the technology of their times to win over their audience. It is easy to dismiss technological acoustic and visual rhetoric as not verbal writing: nonetheless, in theory and application, the Hip Hop middle schoolers, Aristotle, Gorgias, and Cicero intersect on issues of purpose and audience. Gorgias and our middle schoolers would agree that the best language use, written or oral, produces an ecstatic experience for the readers or listeners.

Ann Vasaly notes in *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (1993) that the use of ambiance and appeals to the visual as elements of persuasion (pg. 16) have advantages, even if the rhetorical move evokes pathos. The middle schoolers have no qualms about appealing to emotions as a persuasive tool in their texts and with their instructors. They also create a "metaphysical topography" (pg. 41). Middle schoolers argue with icons from their favorite web sites of the power of Hip Hop, they argue with photo images of their heroes (Lil Kim,), they argue with the visual in the latest technology (webs) as Cicero might have by standing on the travertine blocks in the Senate in the Temple of Jupiter Stator. Now as then, appeals to the visual are a component of rhetorical practice. Vasaly describes how Roman orators were trained to

observe concrete details in order to place listeners and then drew on these details to claim inevitability (read: power) (pg. 24).

Kathleen Welch in *Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetroic, Orlaism, and a New Literacy* argues for the inherent rhetoricity of literacy (pg. 10). In her work, she re-races and re-genders classical concepts of human communication and allows revised forms of presentation more closely aligned to the ancient world (Vitanza, Berlin, Jarratt) versus nineteenth-century German philologists. Getting back to our middle schoolers, they could be said to be communicating with rough untheorized classical rhetorical strategies while using digital technologies and writing. The graduate teachers, some of whom were schooled at elite universities remained oblivious to the irony that the middle schoolers were applying classical rhetorical strategies.

Conclusion

I am aware that I have presented to you a selective vision of the technology camp experience. I know that if this were the paper of the students or the African American graduate student or the white, female Kentucky graduate teacher you would have a very different perspective. I have represented and interpreted the reactions of 40 or so 12-14 year olds in taken during a two-week time frame. Nonetheless, within this miniscule space/time/sound byte, I extracted elements of class and race that shaped the middle schoolers' writing in ways that the graduate teachers had not anticipated. The middle schoolers wrote across the curriculum by writing with and writing about technology. They wrote in color and sound for themselves and their community. Through writing the

middle schoolers took power. This redefinition of writing could be seen to be situated in classic rhetorical notions of delivery, purpose and audience. Like Foucault, the middle schoolers focused on subjectivity and power. They subverted institutional and disciplinary notions of technology and writing and thus succeeded in being empowered in one way.

Works Cited

Burnett, Gary. Technology as a Ttool for Urban Classrooms. (1994) ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. New York, ERIC.

Foucault, M. (1989). Discipline and punishment" The birth of the prison. (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Gonsalves, Lisa, M. (2002) "Making connections: Addressing the pitfalls of white faculty/black male student communication." College Composition and Communication 53.3: 435-465.

Janangelo, Joseph. (1981). Technopower and technoppression: Some abuses of power and control in computer-assisted writing environments. Computers and Composition 9.1 47-64.

LeCourt, Donna. (1998). Critical pedagogy in the computer classroom: Politicizing the writing space. Computers and Composition. 15 275-295.

Rabinow, Paul, ed. Foucault Reader. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.* Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP: 1994.

Appendix 1

Computer Camp Transcriptions (6/27 Tape A)

S3 We need more structure. It is hard on my nerves.

S3 The discipline is getting in the way of the pedagogy. I am counting the hours. I am not happy. It is very hard for me to work. It is a struggle.

S2 Part of this is I feel off-kilter because I don't know when one of you will want more structure....We want structure at different times.

S5 Mutual performativity is going on for each other. When someone from the outside comes in I get nervous because I don't know what they will be thinking.

S1 Do we need to somehow better structure the groups? I've been thinking about Cherena. I have not found anyplace she is reachable.

S2 (397) We just all need to know what each other's pedagogy is. We are not taking a walk out there by ourselves.

S3 I am talking again about discipline. They need to do somethings to get their diploma. That might be an incentive for kids to get focused.

S4 I think part that would be decided by what your goals and objectives are and go on that . And discipline functions around that. ...What I pick up from everybody is that the discipline is affecting the pedagogy.

S3 The discipline is affecting my attitude. My much I want to come.